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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000052

SIPDIS

STATE FOR S-ALEC ROSS, S/P, NEA/ARP, R, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2020

TAGS: PHUM KDEM KPAO PGOV EINV ETRD BA

SUBJECT: NGOS LAUD INTERNET FREEDOM SPEECH; ALEC ROSS

ENGAGES GOB ON KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT REF: A. STATE 4203 B. 09 MANAMA 49 Classified By: Ambassador Adam Ereli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

- 1.(C) Summary: Bahraini civil society representatives expressed strong support for the Secretary's January 21 internet freedom speech, during a
- 2.(SBU) Four leading Bahraini civil society representatives were wholly supportive of the Secretary's January 21 internet freedom speech (ref A
- 3.(SBU) The attendees said that several U.S. firms' technologies were used by the GOB to block websites, and expressed a desire for the USG to
- 4.(SBU) Participants agreed that the GOB is taking positive steps to streamline certain citizen services via its e-government initiative (see B
- 5.(C) The civil society representatives all lamented the GOB's decision to use censorship to control online political activism, noting that app
- 6.(C) The attendees claimed that stymieing political freedom of expression was only part of the GOB's rationale for blocking websites; they ass
- 7.(C) When previously asked about the blocking of websites, Undersecretary of Culture and Information Mohammed al-Banki said that many of the a
- 8.(C) The participants in the January 24 roundtable discussion included Abdulla Al-Derazi of the respected Bahrain Human Rights Society, Sharaf
- 9.(C) The Secretary's Senior Advisor for Innovation, Alec Ross, and Ambassador met January 26 with Sheikh Ahmed bin Attiyatallah Al-Khalifa, St
- 10.(C) Sheikh Ahmed proudly touted the GOB's e-government initiative, which was ranked 13th in the world by a 2010 UN study, far ahead of other
- 11.(C) In response to a query from Ross, the Minister acknowledged that the GOB is focused on infrastructure and government e-services, and tha
- 12.(C) Ross also met January 27 with the deputy head of the Central Informatics Organization (CIO), Sheikh Salman bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa -- re
- 13.(C) Forty-five year old Sheikh Ahmed bin Attiyatallah studied mathematics and computer science in the U.K. in the 1980s and has played a lea
- 14.(C) Since 2008, the GOB has, in fits and starts, sought to block numerous websites (ref B). The largest number blocked are pornographic or c
- 15.(C) The GOB's approach to online dissent strikes many observers as tin-eared, given the GOB's desire to maintain its international reputatic